

Message Text

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SUBJECT: NORTHERN JAPAN SUPPORT FOR YOHEI KONO

1. SUMMARY: ORGANIZATION TO SUPPORT LDP DEFECTOR YOHEI KONO IS BEING FORMED IN HOKKAIDO. FORMATION OF GROUP PROVIDES SOME EVIDENCE THAT KONO'S MOVEMENT HAS FUTURE POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH. IN NEAR TERM, LOCAL CONSERVATIVE LEADERS ARE CONCERNED THAT KONO-CONNECTED CANDIDATES COULD TAKE AWAY VOTES FROM LDP CANDIDATES IN COMING GENERAL ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

2. AT SEPTEMBER 18 SAPPORO MEETING, LOCAL SUPPORTERS OF YOHEI KONO WILL GATHER TO HEAR HIM SPEAK AND TO INAUGURATE HOKKAIDO NEW LIBERALISM STUDY ASSOCIATION. BRANCHES OF THIS ORGANIZATION ARE ALREADY BEING FORMED IN OTHER HOKKAIDO CITIES; EIGHTY PEOPLE, FOR EXAMPLE, ATTENDED FOUNDING MEETING IN KUSHIRO ON SEPTEMBER 5. ALL OF THIS ACTIVITY IS BEING CONDUCTED WITH EXPECTATION--OR HOPE--THAT IN TIME KONO'S BREAKAWAY NEW LIBERAL CLUB WILL BE TRANSFORMED INTO FULL-FLEDGED POLITICAL PARTY.

3. MEMBERS AND PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS INCLUDE SEVERAL CITY ASSEMBLY-MEN FROM NUMBER OF HOKKAIDO CITIES ALONG WITH YOUNGER BUSINESSMEN (MANY OF THEM JUNIOR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MEMBERS). MOST INTERESTINGLY, AT LEAST SOME ARE CURRENT LDP ACTIVISTS. KUSHIRO

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GROUP INCLUDES VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF THAT CITY'S LDP

CHAPTER, AND SAPPORO CONTINGENT INCLUDES LEADERS OF HOKKAIDO LDP YOUTH DEPARTMENT.

4. LDP LEADERS HERE VIEW NEW ASSOCIATION WITH APPREHENSION, NOT BECAUSE IT POSSESSES OR IS SOON LIKELY TO POSSESS SUBSTANTIAL STRENGTH, BUT BECAUSE ITS REPRESENTATIVES ARE TALKING OF BACKING 2 OR 3 CANDIDATES IN COMING GENERAL ELECTION. AND, LOCAL OBSERVERS AGREE, EVEN THOUGH THESE CANDIDATES ARE NOT LIKELY WINNERS, THEY COULD DRAW AWAY ENOUGH CONSERVATIVE VOTES TO IMPERIL SOME LDP CONTENDERS WHO ALREADY FACE DIFFICULT GOING. THIS IS PARTICULARLY FORBODING PROSPECT FOR LOCAL CONSERVATIVES WHO RECALL TOTAL DEFEAT OF HOKKAIDO LDP IN 1974 UPPER HOUSE ELECTION BROUGHT ON BY MAVERICK CANDIDACY OF SEIRANKAI MAN WHO RECEIVED LARGE NUMBER OF VOTES AND UNDERCUT PARTY CANDIDATES.

5. SO FAR, SUPPORTING MOVEMENT FOR KONO IN NORTHERN JAPAN SEEMS TO BE MODEST ONE BOTH IN TERMS OF NUMERICAL STRENGTH AND GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD. DURING RECENT VISIT TO SENDAI, FOR EXAMPLE, WE WERE TOLD THAT NO BACKERS' GROUP HAS BEEN FORMED THERE AND NONE WAS PLANNED IN NEAR FUTURE. AND CERTAINLY NO MAJOR FIGURES HAVE ASSOCIATED THEMSELVES WITH KONO'S CAUSE. YET, WE ALSO HEAR THAT SOME DIETMEN, ONCE ELECTION IS BEHIND THEM, MIGHT JOIN KONO FORCES. CHAIRMAN IN MIYAGI PREFECTURE TOLD US HE BELIEVED WHEN JSP SHIFTS ARE COMPLETED, KONO GROUP WILL BE AS STRONG NUMERICALLY AS DSP. WHO THESE CLOSET KONOITES ARE IS NOT CLEAR, BUT AT LEAST ONE POSSIBILITY IN HOKKAIDO IS DIETMAN USABURO CHIZAKI, WHO HAS BEEN TAKEN TO TASK BY PARTY OFFICIALS FOR UNGUARDED EXPRESSION OF SYMPATHY FOR KONO.

6. COMMENT: WHILE WE ARE UNAWARE OF EXTENT TO WHICH KONO HAS BEGUN TO ESTABLISH ORGANIZATIONAL BASE ELSEWHERE IN JAPAN, WE THINK HOKKAIDO DEVELOPMENTS ARE NOTEWORTHY IN TWO RESPECTS. FIRST, THEY UNDERSCORE POSSIBILITY THAT EMERGENCE OF NEW LIBERAL CLUB-AFFILIATED CANDIDATES COULD COMPLICATE UP-COMING ELECTION CAMPAIGNS FOR AND BE HARMFUL TO LDP, PRESUMABLY NOT ONLY HERE BUT IN OTHER PLACES IN JAPAN AS WELL. SECOND, FACT THAT SUPPORTERS GROUP IS BEING ESTABLISHED IN THIS NORTHERN ISLAND PROVIDES SOME EVIDENCE THAT KONO'S MOVEMENT, IF NOT EXACTLY SWEEPING COUNTRY, DOES HAVE VITALITY AND POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH IN OUTLYING AREAS.

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